

## “GREEK FIRE” AND THE BULGARIANS IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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The history of the “Greek fire” is comparatively well-known thanks to historical research on Byzantine weaponry from the Early Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> In Greek historical sources there are various appellations to this “secret” Byzantine weapon: liquid fire (ὕγρον πῦρ), Midian fire (Μηδικὸν πῦρ), artificial fire (ἐσκευασμένον πῦρ), Roman fire (πῦρ ῥωμαϊκόν), marine fire (πῦρ θαλάσσιον), battle fire (πολεμικὸν πῦρ), etc. Later, European crusaders named it “Greek fire”.<sup>2</sup> *Tactica* of the Emperor Leo VI the Wise (886–912)<sup>3</sup> and *De administrando imperio* of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (912–959) comprise valuable descriptions of the “Greek fire”.<sup>4</sup>

As it is well known, the one who devised the liquid fire was the Syrian Kallinikos, born in Heliopolis (today Baalbek, in Lebanon), who in the middle of the seventh century “took refuge” in Byzantium.<sup>5</sup> This fact came to Bulgarian knowledge through the Old-Bulgarian translation of several Byzantine historical works. For example in *The Chronicles of Symeon Logothetes* it is said: ΚΑΛΙΝΙΚΟΣ ΕΘΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΑΡΒΕΡΩΔΕΩΣ ΩΣ ΕΛΠΙΥΝΑΓΩ ΓΡΑΦΑ ΣΗΡΗΣΚΑΓΩ, ΠΡΗΒΕΓΓ ΚΤΥ ΓΡΥΚΩ, ΟΥΝΗ

<sup>1</sup> For “Greek fire”, see: C. ZENGHELIS, *Le feu grégeois et les armes à feu des byzantins*. *Byz* 7 (1932) 265–286; M. MERCIER, *Le feu grégeois*. Paris 1952; J. R. PARTINGTON, *A History of Greek Fire and Gunpowder*. Cambridge 1960; H. R. ELLIS-DAVIDSON, *The Secret Weapon of Byzantium*. *BZ* 66 (1973) 61–74; J. HALDON – M. BYRNE, A possible solution to the problem of Greek fire. *BZ* 70 (1977) 91–99; Θ. ΚΟΡΡΕΣ, “Ὑγρόν πῦρ”. *Ένα όπλο τής βυζαντινής ναυτικής τακτικής*. Θεσσαλονίκη 1989 (with bibliography, σελ. 11–19 and quotations from selected sources on “liquid fire”, σελ. 153–187); *Константин Багрянородный. Об управлении империей. Текст, перевод, комментарий*, под ред. Г. Г. ЛИТАВРИНА – А. П. НОВОСЕЛЬЦЕВА. Москва 1989, 342–343, бел. 33; J. HALDON – A. LACEY – C. HEWES, “Greek fire” revisited: recent and current research. In: *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization*. In *Honour of Sir Steven Runciman*, ed. E. JEFFREYS. Cambridge 2006, 290–325.

<sup>2</sup> A. DAIN, Appellations grecques du feu grégeois. In: *Mélanges de philology, de literature et d’histoire anciennes offerts à Alfred Ernout*. Paris 1940, 121–127, where various appellations of “Greek fire” in Byzantine sources are listed.

<sup>3</sup> Leonis imperatoris *Tactica*, PG, 107, col. 1008 C – D.

<sup>4</sup> *Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, De administrando imperio*, edidit GY. MORAVCSIK, anglisce vertit R. J. H. JENKINS (CFHB I). Washington, D. C. 1967, 68.73–70.103.

<sup>5</sup> *Theophanes, Chronographia*, rec. C. DE BOOR, I. Textum graecum continens. Lipsiae 1883, 354.13–17; *Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, De administrando imperio*, 226.28–32; *Symeon Magister et Logotheta, Chronicon*, rec. S. WAHLGREN (CFHB XLIV/1). Berolini et Novi Eboraci 2006, 167.19–168.22.

κῶνυσι τῷ πρῶτῳ οὐστρῶνι.<sup>6</sup>

Scientific research indicates that “Greek fire” is a mixture of crude oil and niter (with instances when sulphur, quicklime, tar, etc. are added). It was projected through the use of particularly designed tubes (siphons) by means of heating and ignition. Byzantines first<sup>7</sup> employed their new weapon in the 70s of the seventh century. “Greek fire” was utilized to great effect against the Muslim fleets, helping to repel the Muslims at Constantinople in 678 and the Russians in 941. In the course of centuries its use turned to be rather occasional and still it remained in the arsenal of Byzantine weaponry until the very end of the Empire in 1453.

The fact that Bulgarians, following the first few centuries after they had settled in, not only witnessed the use but also managed to acquire a certain amount of the “Greek fire”, is still veiled in obscurity. The decisive role they played in repelling Muslims during the second massive Arab siege at the imperial capital in 717–718<sup>8</sup> was mentioned more than once in the historical sources. Then Byzantines once again utilized “Greek fire” against the Arab fleet<sup>9</sup> and the Bulgarians who were situated near Constantinople witnessed its powerful effect.

The first confirmed piece of information stating that the Bulgarians took possession of a certain amount of the “Greek fire” dates back from the beginning of the ninth century. The Byzantine chronologist Theophanes the Confessor (c. 760–817) reported that following a siege at the beginning of November, 812 the Bulgarian Khan Krum (796–814) captured the Black Sea fortress of Mesembria (today Nesebar). Apart from the rich spoils of war, which he appropriated from the site, he managed to seize another 36 copper siphons (σίφωνας χαλκοῦς εὔρον λς') apart from a rather substantial amount of the “liquid fire” (ὕγρου πυρὸς

<sup>6</sup> Симеона Метафраста и Логофета. *Списание мира от бытия и Летовник, собран от различных летописец.* Санкт Петербург 1905, 70. The Old-Bulgarian translation has the term ὕγρὸν πῦρ as ОГНЬ КῶНУСИ.

<sup>7</sup> Relating to the year when “Greek fire” was used for the first time, see *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813*. Translated with Introduction and Commentary by C. MANGO – R. SCOTT with the assistance of G. GREATREX. Oxford 1997, 494, n. 5.

<sup>8</sup> В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *Средновековна България в светлината на нови извори*. София 1981, 129–155 (The article: „Участието на българите в отблъскването на арабската обсада на Цариград през 717–718 г. според средновековните писмени извори и интерпретацията му в съвременната историография“). A detailed review of sources on the Arab siege, see I. ROSNOW, *Byzanz im 8. Jahrhundert in der Sicht des Theophanes. Quellenkritisch-historischer Kommentar zu den Jahren 715–813* (BBA 57). Berlin 1991, 86–97.

<sup>9</sup> *Theophanes, Chronographia*, Vol. I, 396.8–12, 397.9–12; *Symeon Magister et Logotheta, Chronicon*, 184.

οὐκ ὀλίγον)<sup>10</sup> that was projected from them during battle. Therefore, Byzantines stored both contraptions (siphons) as well as a considerable amount of raw materials to produce “Greek fire” in the fortress of Mesembria. It is to be noted that Mesembria was used as an initial position to set Byzantine attacks on Bulgaria. Thus the Bulgarians came to the knowledge of one of the grand mysteries to Byzantine weaponry from the Early Middle Ages. The supply of ingredients necessary to produce “Greek fire” in Bulgaria was limited, yet not cut off in its entirety. The Bulgarian military not only knew the weapon, but would even utilize it at a later stage.

In the summer of 986, ten years after ascending the throne in Constantinople, the Byzantine Emperor Basil II Boulgaroktonos (976–1025) set out on his first war march against the Bulgarians. The Byzantine historians Leo the Deacon (born circa 950–992) and John Skylitzes (the second half of the eleventh century) provide us with detailed descriptions (though varying to a certain degree)<sup>11</sup> of the deployment of the Byzantine army. Basil II with his troops by the side stormed in Bulgaria at the river Evros (Marica river) valley and got past the pass of the Bulgar gorge (Trayan gates). From here, following the steep and narrow paths (ἐστεινωμέναις καὶ κρημνώδεις ἀτραποῦς)<sup>12</sup> not Via Diagonalis, controlled by the Bulgarians), Byzantines reached the outskirts of Serdica (today Sofia). Leo Melissenos, master and duke general, remained behind with the task to guard the passes in the rear of the Byzantine army.<sup>13</sup> Obviously the Emperor’s scouts were aware of the presence of Bulgarian forces in the vicinity. It appears they were under the command of the kometopouls Samuil and Aaron. This is why on his advance to Serdica, Basil II ordered constituents of his army to besiege some of the Bulgarian fortifications in the rear of the Byzantine army. Amongst was the fortress of Moria. The main body of the Byzantine army marched off to Serdica. Here, at

<sup>10</sup> *Theophanes, Chronographia*, Vol. I, 499.13–14. See also the contentions in Θ. ΚΟΡΡΕΣ, “Ἰγρόν πῦρ”, 64, 116–117, 146; И. БОЖИЛОВ – В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *История на средновековна България VII–XIV век*. София 2006, 133, 135.

<sup>11</sup> В. Н. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История на българската държава през средните векове I/2*. София 1927, 669–673.

<sup>12</sup> *Leo Diaconus, Historia libri decem*, E rec. C. B. HASE (CSHB XXX). Bonnae 1828, 171.8–11. John Skylitzes, on the other hand, notes that after having crossed the gorges and woodlands ahead of Triadica (e.g. Sofia), the Emperor reached a location called Stoponion. There, the Byzantine historian drops out the account of its prime source on the siege of Serdica. See *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum*, rec. I. THURN (CFHB V). Berolini et Novi Eboraci 1973, 330.17–22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum*, 330.15–17. В. Н. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История на българската държава през средните векове I/2*, 669 suggests that Leo Melissenos was deployed in order to guard the mountain passes from the side of the Balkan Range.

the end of July 986, following imperial orders a military camp was built and the fortress of Moria was besieged. In the course of twenty days Byzantine troops held Serdica under siege with no success. A Bulgarian command ambushed and attacked stray Byzantines who were collecting hay and fodder. Many Byzantines were slain along with a considerable number of draught beasts and warhorses that were also seized. "In the aftermath – Leo the Deacon, who witnessed the deed, goes on – siege engines or the rest of the devices did no good because of the lacking experience of those who drew them to the walls, and as a result they enemy set them on fire (πυρποληθέντων παρὰ τῶν δυσμενῶν)".<sup>14</sup> The information sounds too general, yet it leaves room for speculations whether Bulgarian army at Serdica utilized "Greek fire". The use of incendiary devices at the time was not an isolated case and shows that fire played an important role as part of the Bulgarian weaponry.

Meanwhile,<sup>15</sup> with Emperor Basil II at the walls of Serdica, another party of his army, which had to guard the passes near the Bulgar gorge, attacked the Bulgarian fortress of Moria. This is the only stronghold in Thrace to be mentioned as Bulgarian tenure during the Byzantine-Bulgarian wars from 971–1018. Its exact location and its name<sup>16</sup> provided for long debates as part of various scientific researches, with no clear conclusions to be arrived at to this present moment.

The fortress of Moria was mentioned for the first and last time by the Byzantine author Kekaumenos in connection to Emperor Basil II's attempt to conquer it. Kekaumenos makes a mention of it (ἔστι κάστρον ὀνομαζόμενον Μόρεια) and states it was situated between Philippopolis (Plovdiv) and Triadica (Sofia) – μέσον Φιλίππουπόλεως καὶ Τριάδιτζης. The fortress was under the auspices of the Bulgarians (ὑπὸ τῶν Βουλγάρων). According to Kekaumenos, the well-armed Byzantine Emperor arrived at Moria. There his troops deployed the war machinery they had by the side and started firing at the fortress. In fact, the Emperor left some of his

<sup>14</sup> *Leo Diaconus, Historia libri decem*, 171.11–19.

<sup>15</sup> The chronology of the march to Moria is unclear and historiography studies share diverse opinions on the matter. Kekaumenos is the only source on the march to Moria. His publisher, the Russian Byzantologist Genadyi Litavrin (1925–2009) believes that the fortress might have been besieged either in 986, 1004 or 1015–1016, holding in favour the two earlier dates – see *Кекавмен, Советы и рассказы. Поучение византийского полководца XI века*, подготовка текста, введение, перевод с греческого и комментарий Г. Г. ЛИТАВРИНА. Санкт-Петербург 2003, 431–432, п. 368. According to Г. ЦАНКОВА-ПЕТКОВА, *За похода на Василий II срещу крепостта Мория. ИИБИ 3–4* (1951) 284–285, the most reasonable date is 986.

<sup>16</sup> Various views on the probable location of Moria are stated in P. SOUSTAL, *Thrakien (Thrakē, Rodopē und Haemimontos)* (TIB 6). Wien 1991, 368 and Г. Н. НИКОЛОВ, *Централизъм и регионализъм в ранносредновековна България (края на VII – началото на XI в.)*. София 2005, 196 where there are listed literary sources suggesting the origin of Moria the name.

men besiege Moria, while he set off to Serdica. Byzantines built an embankment (χωματισμόν), whose exterior was made of wood. In the night, however, Bulgarian youngsters from the fortress made their way by stealth to the embankment and went through the woodwork on the exterior. They brought torches, tar and fire chargers with them (δᾶδας καὶ ῥητίνην καὶ πυρεκβόλους), set the interior on fire and, consequently, made their way back. The fire was burning steadily throughout the night and in the morning it suddenly blazed high up causing the siege device to come crashing down. This resulted in the immediate retreat of the Byzantine army, while the Bulgarian inhabitants of the fortress remained “nor subdued neither defeated (ἀχείρωτοι καὶ ἀήττητοι).”<sup>17</sup>

Kekaumenos notes that in order to drive Byzantines away Bulgarian youngsters from Moria employed fire chargers which some research-workers have taken as an instance good enough to prove that they disposed of siphons to project “Greek fire” with.<sup>18</sup> Anyhow, both in Serdica and Moria, fire proved to be the powerful weapon of the besieged Bulgarians, e.g., it was among the preferred defensive weapons of choice in the region. Probably it was because of that a contemporary to the depicted events, the Byzantine poet John Geometres (the second half of the tenth century) not only metaphorically defined the Bulgarian threat as “Scythian fire” (Σκυθικὸν πῦρ)<sup>19</sup> in his poems. “Many Scythians – John Geometres adds up in another poem of his – travel and prowl about the regions in the West as if it is their homeland. Villages and provinces are thus being burnt down (πυρπολοῦνται)...”<sup>20</sup> In a poem, dedicated to kometopoulos (eg. the Bulgarian Tsar) Samuil, the same author writes: “Up in the skies a comet set a blaze, down on the Earth kometopoulos burnt (πυρπολεῖ) the West (e.g. the Balkan lands)... A fearful Typhoon amongst the creatures most vile would set the world on fire with no rest (τὰ πάντα πιμπρᾷ).”<sup>21</sup> As it is known in classical mythology, Typhoon, who was defeated by Zeus, symbolised the calamitous forces of nature, and first and foremost volcanic activity.<sup>22</sup> Comparing the Bulgarian ruler to a mythical creature that spewed forth fire out of its maw points out at the poet’s intention to portray a realistic depiction of the actions of the Bulgarians against the Byzantine army.

The Byzantines themselves would time and again utilize the “Greek fire” on

<sup>17</sup> Кекавмен, *Советы и рассказы*, 196.32–198.12.

<sup>18</sup> Genadyi Litavrin believes that both at Serdica and Moria the Bulgarians utilized “Greek fire”. See Кекавмен, *Советы и рассказы*, 432–433, n. 372.

<sup>19</sup> *Ioannes Geometer, Carmina*, J. P. MIGNE, PG 106, 1863, col. 919 A, 958 A.

<sup>20</sup> *Ioannes Geometer, Carmina*, col. 908 A–B.

<sup>21</sup> *Ioannes Geometer, Carmina*, col. 920 A.

<sup>22</sup> *Словарь античности*. Москва 1989, 580.



the so-called fire-carriers during the Byzantine-Bulgarian war at the end of the tenth century and the beginning of the eleventh century. Following the Leo the Deacon's report, in the summer of 971, the army of the Byzantine Emperor John I Tzimiskes (969–976) held the Bulgarian fortress of Drăstăr (Silistra) under siege, where Sviatoslav I (c. 945–972), warrior prince of Kiev Russia had pitched his camp and set up his troops. In order to strengthen the siege, the Emperor ordered for fire-carrying trieremes (πυρφόροι τριήρεις;<sup>23</sup> πυρφόρων νεών), whose Midian fire<sup>24</sup> instilled fear in the Russians, to be brought. In such a way, the Bulgarians inhabiting the fortresses near the river Danube once again witnessed the effect of the fire-spurting Byzantine weapon.

According to pieces of information to be found in historical sources the Byzantine army with certainty utilized “Greek fire” at least once more against the Bulgarians. At the beginning of the eleventh century Basil II Boulgaroktonos launched a large-scale raid on the Bulgarian Tsardom fighting on several fronts. He placed himself at the head of the Byzantine army, which in the course of eight months, from the summer of 1002 until the winter of 1003, besieged in vain the Bulgarian fortress of Bdin (today Vidin). The settlement was fired at with among others the infamous “Greek fire”. Then also imperial fleet joined forces on the river Danube from where the liquid fire was thrown at the fortress. By the account of Michael of Devol (author of addenda to John Skylitzes’ “Historiarum” from 1118) the Bulgarian defenders in Bdin back then demonstrated considerable proficiency through collecting “Midian fire” in a large pot and subsequently proceeded to extinguish it (ἐνθα καὶ τῶν Βουλγαρικῶν ἀρχόντων διεδείχθη ἡ πολυπειρία. εἰς ἐν γὰρ ἀγγεῖον παμπληθὲς ὀμιλοῦνθες τὸ Μηδικὸν πῦρ διὰ τούτου ἐσβέννυνον).<sup>25</sup>

The other sources, which give account of the Byzantine siege at Bdin, make no mention of “Greek fire”, keeping silent about the consequences which led to the fall of the settlement in to the hands of the Byzantines. John Skylitzes puts an end to his account by informing us that the Emperor got a firm foothold in the

<sup>23</sup> As a matter of fact, these were galleys, called *dromon* – literally translates as ‘runner’. Dromons were long warships, propelled by oars and had room for a crew of 230. It was they to be equipped with the so-called siphons projecting “Greek fire”. Leo the Deacon makes use of archaisms, utilizing the term “trieremes”. See Лев Диакон, *История*. Москва 1989, 168, n. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Leo Diaconus, *Historia libri decem*, 144.1–13, 155.25–156.3.

<sup>25</sup> Ioannes Scylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, 346.44–48. On a few occasions Skylitzes mentions the weapon, yet it is only in this case that he calls it “Midian fire”, favouring the appellation “artificial” (*Ibidem*, 37.60, 22.95, 323.11, 431.77) or “liquid” (*Ibidem*, 151.43, 152.70). The Modern Bulgarian translation of Bishop Michael of Devol’s (Mikhail Devolski’s) addenda, see in B. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *Извори за средновековната история на България (VII–XV в.) в австрийските ръкописни сборки и архиви 1. Български, други славянски и византийски извори*. София 1994, 52. See also Θ. ΚΟΡΡΕΣ, “Υγρόν πῦρ”, 123.

settlement, and afterwards took back to Constantinople.<sup>26</sup> While John Zonaras (11th c.–after 1159) notes that Basil II marched onwards to Bdin and managed to seize it over (τὴν πόλιν αἰρεῖ), adding that “the Emperor subjugated Bdin (τὴν Βιδίνην δὲ ὑφ’ ἑαυτὸν ὁ βασιλεὺς ποιησάμενος).”<sup>27</sup> In a Middle-Bulgarian translation of John Zonaras’ and Symeon Logothetes’ Chronicles the capture of Bdin is referred to, yet there is no mention of “Greek fire” whatsoever.<sup>28</sup> The fire and burnings, however, are present at a later stage in the conflict between the Bulgarian tsardom and the Byzantine Empire at the end of the tenth century and the first two decades of the eleventh century. There are accounts telling that the Byzantines burnt down a vast number of Bulgarian fortresses during their raids: Bitolja (Byzantine Pelagonia) in 1014 (πυρπολήσας),<sup>29</sup> Măglen in 1015 (πῦρ ἐμβάλων),<sup>30</sup> Longon in 1017 (φρούριον ἐμπρήσας),<sup>31</sup> Vishegrad in 1017 (ἐνέπρησε),<sup>32</sup> Setina in 1017 (πάντα κατέφλεξεν),<sup>33</sup> etc.

The review of the historical sources indicates that the Bulgarians way too early became aware of the existing “Greek fire” (the eighth century), acquired its ingredients and projection devices (the beginning of the ninth century) and successfully counteracted to it.<sup>34</sup> In all probability siphons used to project “Greek fire”, employed by the Byzantine fleet, by the tenth–eleventh centuries had already been modified to land battles. The lasting and far too direct territorial closeness of medieval Bulgaria to the Byzantine Empire, and especially its capital Constantinople, as well as the frequent Byzantine-Bulgarian military clashes in the Early Middle Ages were the underlying factors which led to the exposure of the secret Byzantine weapon on behalf of the Bulgarians.

<sup>26</sup> *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum*, 346.53–55. See also В. Н. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История на българската държава през средните векове* I/2, 721–722.

<sup>27</sup> *Ioannes Zonaras, Epitomae historiarum libri XIII–XVIII*, ed. T. BÜTTNER-WOBST (CSHB). Bonn 1897, 560.3, 7–8; Ephraem, author of a Chronicle-in-verse dating back from the fourteenth century also never makes a mention of the “Greek fire” – *Ephraem Aeniota, Historia cronica*, rec. O. LAMPSIDES (CFHB XXVII). Athenis 1990, 109.2923.

<sup>28</sup> A. JACOBS, *ΖΩΝΑΡΑΣ – ЗОНАРА. Die byzantinische Geschichte bei Ioannes Zonaras in slavischer Übersetzung* (Slavische Propyläen 98). München 1970, 263.14–15; 17–18; Симеона Метопфраста и Логофета, *Списание мира от бытия и Летовник*, 159.

<sup>29</sup> *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum*, 351.3–4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum*, 352.26–31.

<sup>31</sup> *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum*, 355.18–22.

<sup>32</sup> *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum*, 356.31–32.

<sup>33</sup> *Ioannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum*, 356.36–38.

<sup>34</sup> For terror caused by “Greek fire” and conflagrations in the Late Middle Ages, as well as counteracting to it, see Р. РАДИЋ, *Страх у позној Византији 1180–1453* II. Београд 2000, 62–70.

## „ГРЪЦКИЯТ ОГЪН“ И БЪЛГАРИТЕ ПРЕЗ РАННОТО СРЕДНОВЕКОВИЕ

ГЕОРГИ Н. НИКОЛОВ/СОФИЯ

(резюме)

Още през първите векове след установяването си на Балканския полуостров българите не само видели битки с употреба на „гръцки огън“, но дори притежавали известно количество от него. В историческите извори нееднократно се споменава за решаващата роля, която те имали за отблъскването на втората голяма арабска обсада над византийската столица през 717–718 г. Тогава византийците използвали „гръцки огън“ срещу арабската флота и намиращите се край Цариград българи станали свидетели на неговата ефикасна сила. Първото сигурно сведение за това, че българите се сдобили с известно количество от „гръцкия огън“, датира от началото на IX в. След обсада на 4 ноември 812 г. българският хан Крум (796–814) завладял Месемврия. Освен голямата плячка, която взели от града, българите отнесли и 36 медни сифона заедно с немалко количество от изхвърляния чрез тях „течен огън“. През 986 г. византийците обсадили крепостта Мория, като издигнали насип, чиято външна част била изградена от дърво. През нощта обаче български младежи от крепостта се промъкнали до този насип и с факли, смола и огнехвъргачки запалили вътрешността на насипа. Кекавмен пише, че за отблъскването на византийците младежите от Мория използвали „огнехвъргачки“, което се приема от някои историци като доказателство, че те са разполагали със сифони за изстрелване на „гръцки огън“. През 1002–1003 г. при обсадата на Видин от армията на Василий II Българоубиец (976–1025) ромеите изстрелвали срещу крепостта прочутия „гръцки огън“. Тогава българските бранители показали голяма опитност, като събирали „мидийския огън“ в едно голямо гърне и по този начин го гасели.

Продължителното и твърде близко по територия съседство на средновековната българска държава с Византийската империя и особено с нейната столица Цариград, както и честите българо-византийски военни сблъсъци през Ранното средновековие били основните фактори, които довели до разкриването на тайното византийско оръжие от страна на българите.